

Provides for team balance

New rule helps girls' gymnastics

By MARTY BUDNER

Anyone involved in high school gymnastics was aware that competition was extremely intense this winter. Traditionally strong teams like Troy and Athens — which had dominated gymnastics in Oakland County throughout this decade — tumbled like tenpins. As an example, at last year's regionals, Athens finished first and Troy third. This year, neither Athens nor Troy qualified as a team for the state championships.

The regional winner was surprising North Farmington, followed by Bloomfield Hills Laker. The Raiders proved their regional victory was no fluke by tying for the state title with Ludington. It's not that teams like Troy and Athens regressed. Other teams improved drastically.

And, how did that overnight renaissance occur? One simple reason. As a long standing rule of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) — which governs prep sports — gymnasts were not allowed to compete simultaneously with high school

teams and private clubs. However, according to club promoter Steve Whitlock, the rule was lifted this year. Gymnasts were allowed to compete in two non-high school meets. Because most serious gymnasts are veteran club members, they are well advanced by the time they reach high school. When these gymnasts were offered a chance to compete at both levels this year, most accepted the challenge.

All of the first-team gymnasts highlighted in today's Observer & Eccentric, for example, are conscientious Whitlock students. Kathy Temple, who was selected by local coaches as the best all-around performer, has been with Whitlock for the past five years.

In this, her first year of high school competition, she won the state individual championship. Temple's background was a vital factor in winning that title.

Teri Teitke, a senior who was in her first year of competition for Athens, finished third in the state. She elected to forego her first two years at Athens in favor of private training. Even all the members of the O&E's

second team, except for Troy's Lisa Boes, have had previous contact with the Whitlock school. Boes received private training, though not with Whitlock.

"I would say high school competition was a lot better this year," said Whitlock, who has been running his popular school in Bloomfield Hills since 1973.

"Most of the girls who placed at the state meet have been affiliated with clubs for a long time. It's obvious that if they start training at an early age, then they'll be better than most of the other girls when they get to high school."

Temple, only a sophomore at North Farmington, started her gymnastics career with the Farmington YMCA. She then continued instruction at the Whitlock school.

In four years with Whitlock, Temple rapidly moved through the intermediate to advanced stage. She recently competed in a five-state regional competition where she "scored respectably, but missed qualifying for the Eastern U.S. championship by 45-hundredths of a point," according to Whitlock.

"Because she's with a club, she can continue her training even though her high school season is over," said Whitlock, a member of NCAA gymnastics champion Southern Illinois University a few years back.

"In the past, the school rule was that girls weren't permitted to compete in any other organization outside of high school. In order to do this, the girls would have had to give up the higher level of competition with the clubs. Most of the serious gymnasts weren't willing to do that."

"This past year the state changed the rule, allowing gymnasts to compete in two other events other than high school," he said. "This meant that gymnasts such as Kathy Temple and Teri Teitke were able to compete concurrently with the high schools and clubs."

It also meant the girls were forced to practice with their high school teams in the afternoon, then speed right to Whitlock's practices later in the evening. The better gymnasts put in as much as five hours practice a day.

As long as that type of two-fold relationship continues, high school girls' gymnastics will consistently improve.

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Former Raiders shine at Ferris

Former North Farmington prep stars Bob Miller and Mike Spengler are members of the Ferris State College track team — and coach Ray Heising is glad they came.

Miller, who lettered in both track and football at North Farmington, is a sophomore hurdler at Ferris. His top performance this season came in a second-place finish in the Ferris State Invitational in the 60-yard high hurdles (07.69).

Spengler, a sophomore, runs the middle distance events for the Bulldogs.



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